

IN WESTERN HOMES.

Mr. A. W. Campbell Writes Entertainingly of Wheeling People

WHO HAVE FOUND THEIR FORTUNES

In the West—The St. Louis Branch of the Stifel Family and Their Successors. A Talk on Cremation—The Prejudice Against This Disposition of the Dead—Captain Mitchell and His Reminiscences of the River Trade in the Old Days—Mr. Thompson, a Former Wheeling Banker, and His Success in Western Fields.

Special Correspondence of the Intelligencer.
WESTERN GROVES (near St. Louis), Mo.,
Jan. 14, 1895.

In my last letter from this place I intimated that I might soon follow up my notes about former Wheeling people, now resident in St. Louis and vicinity, with something additional in regard to others whom I had not then met. Conspicuous among our old time residents, since seen and talked with are the members of the well known Stifel family. As in Wheeling, so in St. Louis, this family is both prosperous and influential. Their first rendezvous in America was at Wheeling. J. L. Stifel, the senior member of the family, the father of Louis and William Stifel, who carry on their father's life long business at the old stand in North Wheeling, was the pioneer from Germany to America. He came early in the thirties and was followed soon after by his brother Elias, and then by those resident here. Altogether they were eight in number, not counting the father who came over late in life to lay his bones among them. There were five brothers and two sisters. One brother and one sister died long ago in Wheeling and, at a later day, the much respected senior of the family whom I have named.

In August last the two brothers and the sister residing here were in Wheeling to participate in celebrating the eightieth birthday of their brother, Elias. He is now the oldest surviving member of the family, and next to him comes Charles, the millionaire brewer here, and next, a widowed sister, Mrs. Winkelmeyer; and after her, the youngest member of the family, Mr. Christopher Stifel, a retired tobacco man. All these representatives of the family here live in attractive homes, surrounded as Shakespeare said old age should be surrounded by comfort and "troops of friends." I have been in all their homes and can speak from personal observation.

PROSPERITY A FAMILY INHERITANCE.
The faculty of getting on in life seems to be a family inheritance among the Stifels. At all events they have all done well in both Wheeling and St. Louis. Those here have done especially well as regards the accumulation of money. They are among the rich people of St. Louis. "Our mother, Louis," said Mr. Charles to me the other day, "might have made a great deal more money than he did but for his extreme conservatism. He was absolutely averse to branching out in his business, and was really reluctant to introduce machinery of a labor saving and productive character. He was content with a slow and steady gain in his property, and always preferred to keep his boat near shore."

This is true, as I happen to know, and reminds me of a conversation I had years ago with the Rev. Mr. Barnitz, who visited Mr. Stifel more or less in his last illness, and who said that the old gentleman on no occasion remarked to him that while he had always been careful and economical of his means yet he felt thankful that he had never become a mere money lover, or, as he put it, a mere "money grub." I think he had sent for Mr. Barnitz in regard to a bequest to his church. You will recall that Mr. Stifel remembered several charities in his will. Major Loring used to speak of him in the board of the Benwood Iron works as "Gortchakoff" because of his supposed resemblance to the long-headed cabinet minister of Russia. No member of the Benwood cabinet was more influential than Mr. Stifel. His memory of transactions was almost phenomenal, and his judgment, while extremely conservative, always reliable.

THE ANCESTRAL HOMESTEAD.
I spent two pleasant weeks in Germany in the province of Wurtemberg, (a little kingdom), from which the Stifels came, and remember it as a hilly country not unlike the Panhandle of West Virginia. Two of the great German dynasties originated there, viz, the famous Hohenstaufens, of the Crusade era, and the present reigning family, the Hohenzollerns. There is a little tongue of land, about the size of the Panhandle, enclosed in the midst of the little kingdom and still called Hohenzollern. There the family originated. The "Hohen" in their name, and that of their predecessors, the Hohenstaufens, simply means a "mount." You see all the "robber barons" of the Rhine and Danube regions in Germany originally built their castles on a mount. Mr. Charles Stifel tells me that one of these castles on a mount overlooked their family home at Neudorf, near the Rauthe Alps, in Wurtemberg.

There is quite a family resemblance between the sister here (Mrs. Winkelmeyer) and her brother Louis, and something about the prosperous brewer that reminds me of the late lamented Dr. Albert Stifel. I speak of the prosperous brewer, but I should say ex-brewer, for he sold his business out for a million several years ago to the English syndicate that absorbed so many concerns in this country at fancy prices. The great Anheuser-Busch concern (covering fifty acres) wanted ten millions for their properties and could have had eight.

PARITANS AND CREMATION.

The other day I took a carriage ride with the two Stifel brothers to see their crematory in the southwestern part of the city. I say their crematory because one is president and the other treasurer of this association for the incineration of the dead, and because they take a special and leading interest in its success. During our ride I told them of my visit to the famous crematory that stands in the midst of the historic cemetery in Paris, known as Pere la Chaise, and of the fact that notwithstanding the Parisians were supposed to be a sad lot of indifference to death, yet somehow they did not take kindly to cremation. Indeed, it seemed as if they preferred to be buried on top of each other in Pere la Chaise to being reduced to ashes by fire. The largest patronage of their crematory came from the hospitals and dissecting rooms. One would suppose that the argument made against Dr. Le Moyné's crematory at Washington, Pa., would have had a charm for the saint Parisians, viz: that it was a scheme to cheat the devil by making identification and individualization impossible

on the morning of the resurrection, but somehow it had not caught them up to the time of my visit.

AN EXAMPLE OF ST. LOUIS PREJUDICE.

The Stifels, in apologizing for the somewhat remote location of their institution, spoke of the prejudice that had denied them a site either in the Bellefontaine cemetery, where they wished to erect it, or even, close by it, or, indeed, at two or three other desirable sites that they had selected and actually bought, and successively been obliged to resell. These prejudices were partly religious and partly sanitary, and yet neither of them, as they claimed, had any foundation or justification in common sense or ancient experience. They listened with much interest to my recital of my explorations in the famous Columbarium on the Appian Way near Rome, where several persons of the household of faith named by Paul in his letter to the Romans were found carefully urned in little jars that stood in the recesses of the walls—notably the remains of Tryphena, Hesperia, Tryphosa and others, who were supposed to belong to the imperial household of Caesar. They had all been cremated and there was no evidence that the practice was then looked on with prejudice or disfavor by the early Christians. Indeed nearly everybody, except those rich enough to afford tombs, were cremated at one time in Rome. Then came the Catacomb era of the city, when it was the fashion to use the long chambered underground recesses outside the walls that present such ghastly sights of grim skeletons to-day. As I looked between mummies in Egypt and skeletons in Rome the argument is decidedly with the cremationists. A nice urn duly inscribed is decidedly pleasanter to gaze upon than even a well wrapped mummy or a hideous skeleton. Still, for all this, it is evident that cremation is not yet popular, albeit it appeals strongly to the slender resources of the poor as an economical disposition of their dead. Dr. Le Moyné used to inveigh against costly funerals and costly cemeteries as a conspicuous part of the conventional machinery of our civilization that exported from the poor.

MODERN CREMATION EXCEEDINGLY SIMPLE.

The modern method of cremation is exceedingly simple. Let me in a few words describe the modus operandi at the St. Louis crematory. There is an upstairs chapel in the building that contains below the incinerating furnaces. There is a platform for the preacher and an organ for the choir, and seats for the family and friends in the body of the house. There is in the midst of this small house a sort of catafalque, or rather a casket shaped bier (so to speak) covered with black cloth and opening at the receiving end with a double door just like a bier. Into this receptacle the coffin is shoved, the doors closed, and as far as the family is concerned this is the end of the funeral outside of the services. While the services are in progress the coffin noiselessly descends on the elevator on which it rests to the furnace below, and there the body is taken out of its casket, wrapped in a large saturated cloth, placed on an iron rack that is shoved on rollers into a furnace heated like that historic one through which the three Hebrew salamanders passed, several degrees above average, and by the time the last word is said upstairs the body is well on its way to complete reduction to its pound or two of residuum. "To this complexion must we come at last," whether by this process or the slower one of decay, and by either process the earth and the air get exactly that portion of the human body that belongs to them. So that as regards "the morning of the last day" it makes no sort of difference which process is employed. It does seem, however, to make some difference to our imagination as to whether we go into an urn or rest in the companionship of the dead in a cemetery, and I could not but observe that my friend, the elder Stifel, had erected a splendid granite canopy in the cemetery, wherein the urns of the family are to be deposited, and whereon the passerby will read that "once in the flight of ages past there lived a man" of his particular name. This after all is the craving or the weakness of humanity, to be not forgotten in the hereafter.

"For who, to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor lost one longing, lingering look behind?"

AN AFTERNOON OF REMINISCENCES.

It suddenly occurs to me that I am making a not very cheerful letter out of all this account and comment in regard to Cremation, and I will break it right off with my quotation above from Gray's famous elegy on a country church yard. I am writing, as I remarked at the outset, about old time Wheeling people who are still above ground in this region. Every few days I hear of a new name. Very lately I had a talk with a somewhat remarkable man who was born on Scotch Ridge, on the Ohio side, not far from Martin's Ferry, Mr. John J. Mitchell, or, as I should rather designate him, perhaps, Capt. John J. Mitchell, since he will be best known to your older readers as a river man. In that capacity as a flat boatman—he set out away back in the thirties to make his fortune, and he has succeeded to such an extent that he is now well known as one of the wealthy citizens of St. Louis. He entertained me for the good part of an afternoon with old time reminiscences of Wheeling and Wheeling vicinity. He inquired particularly after his old friend, Capt. Richard Crawford, whom he cordially remembers as one of the acquaintances and friends of his early days, and was much pleased to know that the captain could still "tally-ho the hounds" and shoot on the wing. He himself is also remarkably well preserved at eighty-one years of age, and like Gladstone his age is not dim nor his capacity for work greatly abated. He still gives attention to a large business, albeit it is mainly of an investment character; and as he stands up and confronts you his stalwart proportions and vigorous style suggest a man of sixty rather than an octogenarian. He looks not unlike Capt. Jerry Mason, and recalls a little also the appearance of the late William Goshorn. Evidently, ploughing the waves of the turbid and tawny rivers that centre at St. Louis have agreed with him physically as well as financially.

A SUCCESSFUL VENTURE.

Speaking of the rivers he told me how in December 1839, he built and loaded two flat boats with flour in eight days and was on his way to New Orleans with his cargo. A man named Wilson Stringer built them at the lower end of Wheeling Island, and they were loaded at Bridgeport and Portland. Moses Rhodes, of the former place, father of Ebenezer Rhodes, was one of his purchasing agents. He paid \$2.65 per barrel for the flour and got four dollars for it and a quarter in New Orleans. He also got New York exchange at two and a half per cent discount and the Northwestern Bank of Wheeling gave him a premium of twelve and a half per cent on his return. This was in the days following the panic of 1837. He spoke of the wild cat money that was then afloat. The Northwestern bank did not suspend (all the other Wheeling banks did) but

they issued what were called "post notes," payable twelve months after date, and the first five thousand put out fell to him, and he remembers that the president and cashier (Archibald Woods and John List) sat up all of one night signing them and getting them ready for issue. With these and subsequent issues he bought flour all the way from the Ohio river to Illinois, and, all told, he circulated three hundred thousand dollars of these "post notes." They passed current, and had preference over other money, because it got to be generally known that the bank had not suspended.

A CORRECT ESTIMATE.

Speaking about this kind of money led the old gentleman into an expression of opinion in regard to the foolishness going on at Washington in these days in respect to our finances. "Democrat that I am, and always have been, and always expect to be," said he, "I can't stand that crowd at Washington. I think the Republicans have more financial and business sense."

Captain Mitchell told of being on the steamer City of Wheeling (of the old Union line) with Captain McAnure, when she sunk on her way up from Louisville, and of his buying the "Baltimore," of the same line, when it failed, for \$18,000 (she cost \$80,000), and putting her in the St. Louis and Alton trade in connection with the Chicago & Alton railroad, just opened, and of his also putting on a line between St. Louis and New Orleans, in all of which, as in everything else he touched, he made a great deal of money. Even the loss of his original investment in the stock of the Chicago & Alton railroad made him money, he said, for he bought the third mortgage bonds at fifteen cents on the dollar and exchanged them at par for the reorganized stock of the company, worth now 157 and paying 8 per cent dividends.

CAPTAIN MITCHELL'S DECEASEMENT.

Captain Mitchell married a daughter of Col. John Bayless, an old Marylander, who was prominent in his day up at Portland, and they walked the long path together until her death two years ago. He spoke of her death in a deep, strong and sad way. His brother, William, who was his partner in business for many years, married for his second wife a Miss Barnes, of Wellsburg, a sister of Mr. Ephraim Barnes, of St. Louis, of whom I made mention in my last letter. A son of his is now president of that famous institution in Chicago (the Illinois Trust and Savings bank) that stood the all day and all night run during the panic of '93, and remained as unshaken as Gibraltar at the close.

CHANGES IN METHODS OF TRANSPORTATION.

"Shortly after the war," said Capt. Mitchell, in discussing the great changes that had taken place since the war, "I thought I saw very distinctly that the end of profitable steamboating was near at hand, and I concluded to get out of boats and into railroads, and that is what I have done. The most incredible thing of my experience is this change from natural highways to artificial ones, and now is coming the change from steam to electricity, and who can see the revolution in transportation that is ahead of us? The man who is around here a few years from now will look upon all of us as a back number sure enough."

I could lengthen out this letter indefinitely with interesting things said by the captain, and I find that I have omitted much that he said of his early contemporaries on the river; such men, for instance, as those old Brooks county argonauts represented by such names as James Palmer, Peter Curran, Basil Beall, William White, Lewis Applegate, and I know not how many others, but I must content myself with what I have thus far jotted down, in respect to our conversation. I may refer to it again at another time.

ANOTHER MAN WORTH LOOKING UP.

I was probably indebted mainly to our old friend Dally Thompson here for my talk with the captain. He remarked to me, knowing my propensity to delve in Ohio Valley reminiscences and traditions, that the captain was a man well worth my looking up, and so indeed he is. And by the way, Dally Thompson is also, himself, a man well worth looking up, as I found at the close of a long talk with him at his office at the Laclede Gas Company, of which he is treasurer. He is a graduate of the old Merchants' and Mechanics' bank at Wheeling, and as far back as 1856 was sent down to Point Pleasant to take charge of the branch there. He had lively times during the war, when Jenkins was raiding the country, and he and his directors were kept busy burying the funds of the bank in secluded places. It got to be too exasperating for a matter of fact man like our old friend, and so he accepted the cashiership of the Second National at Cincinnati, and after the war embarked, disastrously, in sugar and cotton planting in the south. He went in on the flood tide, when the boom was on in those two great staples, and came out on the ebb, when nothing was high but expenses. However, he is all right now, and has been for years past, and holds a congenial position in the great twenty million gas company of St. Louis.

A. W. C.



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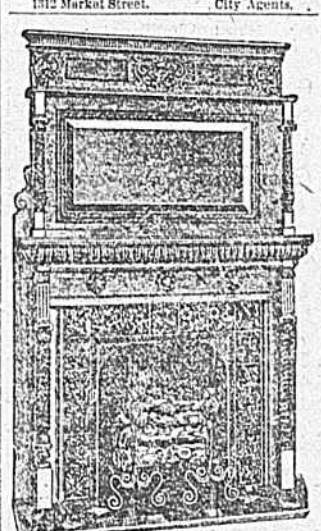
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